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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [IV](#)

SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE: CONTROVERSY OVER IDENTIFICATION

Classified By: POL/ECON Jim Wojtasiewicz, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) Summary. A bitter dispute over how to identify who is an Ivoirian lies at the heart of Cote d'Ivoire's current political crisis. No new identifications have been registered since 2003, and no identity cards have been issued since 1999. Prime Minister Banny has made resuming the identification process one of his top priorities, but President Gbagbo's followers are insisting that the rebel New Forces (FN) must first disarm. Going forward with both identification and disarmament at the same time seems like a reasonable compromise, but it is far from clear whether the political will is there to accept it. There is no solution to the Cote d'Ivoire crisis without a credible identification process. Unless this process gets underway in April or early May, which is highly unlikely, elections cannot take place in ¶2006. End Summary.

¶2. (C) A long, tangled, bitter dispute over how to identify who is an Ivoirian lies at the heart of Cote d'Ivoire's current political crisis. This dispute can be traced back to 1993 when Laurent Gbagbo's Ivoirian Popular Front (FPI) party, then in opposition, accused Prime Minister Ouattara's government of distributing forged identity cards to foreigners in the North. (Ouattara is from the North and his RDR (Rally for Republicans) party draws much of its support from Northerners.) Ouattara's government instituted new identity cards with tighter security controls. After Henri Konan Bedie became president in 1994 and began propagating the concept of "Ivoirianness" it became progressively more difficult for Northerners to get the new cards. When Bedie was overthrown by a coup in 1999 the government stopped issuing them altogether.

¶3. (C) After Gbagbo was elected president in 2000, and the FPI took control of parliament, they pushed through an entirely new identification process requiring all Ivoirians to register in their home village. This new law no longer accepted as proof of citizenship the Certificate of Nationality, which any Ivoirian can get by proving in court that at least one parent is Ivoirian. Village-based registration was highly unpopular among Northerners because many of their families had long ago migrated to the South. Others were naturalized citizens from neighboring countries to the North who had no home village in Cote d'Ivoire. The FPI's village-based identification was one of the principal reasons for the 2002 coup attempt against Gbagbo. When the rebel New Forces (FN) took control of the North they stopped this identification process there and destroyed many of the records that had been created. Village-based registration continued in government-controlled areas, and in the end about 60 percent of the population was identified through this process, mostly in the South. No cards were issued -- the plan was to identify the entire population and then issue

the cards all at once.

¶4. (C) The 2003 Linas-Marcoussis Agreement halted village-based registration and called for a revised law on identification, to return to a more inclusive identification process under the oversight of a new National Commission for the Supervision of Identification (CNSI), which would be headed by a judge and include representatives of all the political parties. The FPI-controlled National Assembly pushed through a flawed bill in May 2004 that did create the CNSI but also added two new pieces of information to be recorded in the identification process: the height and national origin of the person being registered. This meant that the 60 percent of the population already identified would have to register again. Under pressure from the opposition and South African President Mbeki, President Gbagbo issued a decree in July 2005 removing the national origin requirement but leaving in height.

¶5. (C) The identification process thus remains paralyzed. The CNSI was created and the concept of village-based identification was scrapped in favor of a return to the Certificate of Nationality. However, no new identifications have been recorded since 2003 and no cards have been issued since 1999. Certificates of Nationality continue to be issued in government-controlled areas, but not in FN-controlled areas where there are no courts. There is another important legal procedure by which a person who has no birth certificate can obtain one by bringing witnesses to his identity before a traveling court. These courts are also operating only in government-controlled areas.

¶6. (C) When Prime Minister Banny took office in January he made the resumption of the identification process one of his top priorities, to speed up preparations for elections.

ABIDJAN 00000417 002 OF 002

Indeed, at the February 28 "Yamoussoukro Five" meeting, he persuaded President Gbagbo and the principal opposition leaders to agree that identification and voter registration would be carried out simultaneously. However, at a March 29 cabinet meeting, President Gbagbo rejected a proposal to begin this process by sending magistrates to the North to conduct traveling courts to help people obtain birth certificates. Ever since then his supporters have been conducting a strident campaign against resuming the identification process until the rebels disarm. The rebels have refused to disarm without identification. Congolese President and AU Chairman Sassou came to Cote d'Ivoire April 8 to try to break this deadlock. After meeting with President Gbagbo and the principal opposition leaders, Sassou announced that agreement had been reached to go forward with identification and disarmament simultaneously. Rebel and opposition leaders embraced this agreement but Gbagbo's followers emphatically rejected it.

¶7. (C) Comment. This dispute stands squarely in the way of any progress toward elections. President Gbagbo has proposed going forward with the elections using the voter registration lists from the last presidential elections in 2000, but the opposition claims many opposition voters were excluded or removed from these lists. Given the deep mistrust on both sides, going forward with identification and disarmament simultaneously, perhaps one small step at a time, seems like a reasonable compromise. However, at this point, it is far from clear whether the political will is there to reach out and take it. There is no solution to the Cote d'Ivoire crisis without a credible identification process. Unless this process gets underway in April or early May, which is highly unlikely, elections cannot take place in 2006. End Comment.

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